DIVINE LORRAINE HOTEL
699 North Broad Street
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6683
*PA,51-PHILA,739-*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## DIVINE LORRAINE HOTEL
## (Lorraine Apartment House)

**HABS No. PA–6683**

**LOCATION:** 699 N. Broad Street, west side, bounded to the north and south, respectively, by Fairmount Avenue and Potts Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**SIGNIFICANCE:**

The Divine Lorraine Hotel stands among the most visible buildings constructed during the decades that North Broad Street above Spring Garden Avenue challenged—to varying degrees of success—the old elite enclaves and institutions of Center City for designation as the most fashionable residential and civic district of Philadelphia. Constructed as an apartment house, the Lorraine stands among the earliest "full-blown" examples of this type in a city known for its tradition of single family houses. The structure reigns among the important extant works of architect Willis G. Hale whose eccentric and unique high Victorian designs made him the darling of the fashion-conscious *arrivistes* pouring into Northwest Philadelphia late in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century.

**DESCRIPTION:**

The ten-story Divine Lorraine Hotel holds a ponderous presence among the more modestly-scaled adjacent blocks. The building, with a roughly square footprint, has a front-facing areaway that extends about halfway back into the edifice mass and divides the western-oriented façade into two parts linked by two stacked monumental archways. The split façade is underscored by a pair of unique temple-like parapet walls facing Broad Street. The exterior walls are predominantly of buff-colored roman brick embellished with generous quantities of decorative brick and stone detailing. Along with the stacked arches, triple stone pediments over what were the primary entrances to the building and its original commercial spaces reference the triumphal arch of Roman classicism.

Above the first story on the façade are four window bays extending upward to the eighth floor—two for each side of the building. The side and rear walls also contain a series of bay-like extensions that contain single oval windows (corresponding with shared bathrooms on the interior). These bays are flanked by iron-railed balconies that were part of a complex fire-escape system. This system, along with the building's "fireproof" construction, indicate the danger that fire still held for buildings at the end of the nineteenth century. An 1893 *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* noted: "for the safety of the inmates iron balconies surround the building on each floor on three sides and fourteen ladders lead down, affording a means of escape in case of fire."[1] An original unarticulated five-story extension at the building's rear along Potts Street once housed the boilers, engine, and dynamo for the

[1] *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* (hereafter *Record*) 8:27 (5 Jul. 1893): 413.

Lorraine's utilities as well as laundry space with "sleep'g rooms above," probably for staff and resident servants of occupants.[2] With the exception of some fenestration changes and blocked windows, and the building's two celebrated neon "Divine Lorraine Hotel" signs facing north and south on the roof, the building remains largely untouched on the exterior.

The main entrance to the building is framed by a temple-front surround. Pairs of freestanding columns with corresponding pilasters behind (all topped with stylized composite order capitals) support an entablature and pediment embellished with a vine pattern in relief and a centrally placed coat-of-arms. This main entrance is separated by a pair of subsidiary portals by large round-headed windows. Similar windows extend down the building's sides alternating with smaller ones topped by segmental lintels. A brick beltcourse extends around the first floor of the building incorporating the window arches. The classical vocabulary on the exterior continues inside in the building's lobby with arched and mirrored recesses set between pilaster strips with composite capitals. The grids for the now covered skylights are visible in the ceiling. This broad corridor terminates in a large registration desk contained under a three-centered archway; a formal staircase rises on the left of the desk.

The building retains much of its original interior detailing. Most of it makes classical references, for example, the columned fireplace surrounds in units containing them. Many of the bathrooms contain the original fixtures: marble topped wash basins, claw foot bathtubs, and porcelain commodes; rooms without direct access to a bathroom have marble topped wash basins. Two barrel-vaulted public spaces are present at the top of the building, an assembly room and a large dining room; these spaces also show the gridded remains of now-covered skylights and contain gothic-like pointed arched doorframes.

Overall, the building maintains much of its integrity, it has been well-maintained and large quantities of its original detailing remain on both the interior and the exterior.

**HISTORY:**

***NORTH PHILADELPHIA***

For the first 150 years, the physical expansion of Philadelphia remained intricately tied to the Delaware River. The neatly gridded plan laid-out by William Penn late in 1682 was originally composed of twenty-two blocks extending between the Delaware and the Schuylkill rivers. Development in the colonial city occurred largely in the blocks east of the center square, organically spilling over north (Northern Liberties) and south (Southwark) of the grid along the Delaware long before driving west towards Schuylkill. By the first decades of the nineteenth century, commercial establishments continued their march further west along Market Street and the Center Square became home to the city's first pumping station—an impressive structure designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe. By the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century, well-heeled Philadelphians looked westward for the formation of their elite enclaves on and around Rittenhouse Square and even across the Schuylkill. If not fully developed—an action that would take many decades—the remainder of Penn's city was at least staked-out.

[2]Ernest Hexamer, *Insurance Maps of the City of Philadelphia*, vol. 5, 1897.

In the eighteenth century, the areas northwest of Northern Liberties and north along the Schuylkill evolved as the location of wealthy Philadelphians' country estates and a variety of more modest farmsteads. Nearly every prominent family in the city owned both a spacious townhouse, as well as an expansive, Georgian-plan rural retreat offering respite from the summer heat and the seasonal epidemics that plagued the dense city. These residences and the neighboring working farms were casually positioned in the landscape and tied together by a tangle of country roads. Their form and direction was based more on property divisions and topography than the rational linearity of the urban grid to the south. Reflections printed in 1883 nostalgically characterized this early landscape: "the whole neighborhood was then a pretty piece of country, upon which the country-seats of noted Philadelphians stood."[3] While the dominant landscape for well over a century, this bucolic mix of farms, country houses, and rural lanes began to change in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

A massive population explosion in antebellum Philadelphia, with over half a million residents by 1860, pushed the necessity for rational planning of the city's inevitable and imminent physical expansion. In the 1840s, the grid of Penn's city was, on paper, extended northward over the houses, farms, institutions, and irregular lanes up to the borders of Roxborough and Germantown.[4] The 1854 Act of Consolidation brought a number of adjacent, but municipally independent, townships under the jurisdiction of the City of Philadelphia. The rationale for this move was simple:

> the city and contiguous territory had practically become one city, with a common future and common wants, and their adequate development was crippled by the multiplicity and jealousy of the many existing governing bodies acting independently of one each other.[5]

With political uniformity completed, the consolidated government worked to standardize the organization of street names and numbering, utilizing a highly logical system that was first employed in Penn's city in 1853 and extended throughout the consolidated city in 1858.[6] The restructuring of the city politic and street grid established, expansion northward could commence unabated, however it did not come to fruition until the decades after the Civil War, at a pace that few could have imagined in 1860.

Historically, wealthy and middling Philadelphians largely remained quartered in center city. Some higher density row-type housing did go up north of Penn's city. Until early in the 1870s, however, most of this construction west of Broad terminated with Girard Avenue. In

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[2]"Improvements in the Northwestern Part of the City—Professor Wagner's Recollections—The Progress of Time," *Public Ledger and Daily Transcript* 18 Aug. 1883, from Scrapbooks of the Wagner Free Institute of Science, 1847–1980, box 8, vol. 3.

[4]*Plan of the District and Township of Penn, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Fox & Haines, 1847).

[5]Edward P. Allinson, *Philadelphia 1681–1887: A History of Municipal Development* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott, Publishers, 1887) 140–141.

[6]Russell F. Weigley, "The Border City in Civil War, 1854–1865," *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982) 375.

the 1870s, horsecar ("streetcar") extensions and road surface improvements made blocks north of Girard Avenue attractive to upper- and middle-class Philadelphians. From that location, the city's political and economic powerbrokers resided within easy reach, by horsecar or private coach, of the center city commercial district. Commodious row and single-family houses intended for upper-class owners and tenants rapidly lined the streets of North Philadelphia, particularly along Broad Street. Despite the concentration of several wealthy industrialists and professionals on Broad Street, on Sixteenth Street, and on nearby avenues, in some respects the neighborhood comprised a second tier of elites. The men who made ostentatious statements of their wealth through the houses they constructed failed to penetrate the social and power circles of Philadelphia's old and established blue-blood families. The wealthy of the North Broad Street area were the *nouveaux riches* who made their fortunes in ways that differed from the practices of Philadelphia's staid gentry. In the 1870s and 1880s, Philadelphia's patrician families maintained their residences in Rittenhouse Square or in suburban Chestnut Hill.[7]

However socially and physically distant the older elite attempted to remain, they could not permanently resist the growing influence and prowess of the city's *arrivistes*. In the post-Civil War decades, many patrician families had retreated to suburban enclaves, leaving a civic vacuum readily filled by the new monied men.[8] Institutions of higher education, moreover, increasingly opened professional positions (doctors, lawyers, and middle managers) to men, and even women, of middle-class origins, and the rise of this group further challenged the relevance of the old elite. Under these changing conditions, by the 1890s, with Broad Street and a number of premier avenues as infrastructural anchors, the area of North Philadelphia from Broad Street west to Fairmount Park between Fairmount Avenue and Susquehanna Street was filled with rows upon rows of houses that catered largely to middle- and upper-class families.

In contrast to its current commercialized state, North Broad Street above Spring Garden Avenue remained almost entirely civic/residential in character late in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century. Commercial interests were mainly scattered throughout the residential blocks in the form of corner stores; however, a notable expanse of retail and service businesses did concentrate itself on Columbia Avenue (Cecil B. Moore Avenue) in the blocks immediately west of Broad Street. As early as 1886 a local periodical declared: "Quite a number of Columbia ave. properties have been turned into stores…it will soon be the up-town Chestnut street."[9]

While North Philadelphia's ability to fully compete with Center City retail establishments never occurred, the area nonetheless remained an attractive residential destination for people of rising fortunes. By the final decades of the nineteenth century, enough of a density of affluent urban dwellers had located there that development efforts underscoring the civic importance of North Broad Street began to percolate along the thoroughfare. Rows of

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[7]E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958); George E. Thomas, "Architectural Patronage and Social Stratification in Philadelphia between 1840 and 1920," *The Divided Metropolis: Social and Spatial Dimensions of Philadelphia, 1800–1975*, eds. William W. Cutler and Howard Gillette (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980) 85–123.

[8]Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968): 79–98.

[9]*Record* 1:34 (20 Aug 1886): 397.

attached, semi-detached, and detached houses lined N. Broad Street in the blocks north of Fairmount. Interspersed within these residences were a number of churches, schools, and other club and institutional buildings; there were virtually no stores and few offices on this expanse of Broad Street. Thus, the stretch of N. Broad Street immediately above City Hall hosted both an area of production sites and industry in the blocks around Spring Garden as well as an extremely affluent and fashionable residential district for some blocks above Fairmount. The transition between the two distinct areas included a stretch of small enterprises, stores, schools, churches, and a synagogue. In the early 1890s, however, the premier residential district received an appropriate and highly visible "entrance" marker—the Lorraine Apartment House.

### *THE LORRAINE*

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, Philadelphia, like other large American cities, saw the construction of its first skyscrapers. Large-scale production of viable iron and later steel structural members, and technological advances in lighting, ventilation, and elevators made taller buildings possible. In most cities, the first tall buildings were relegated to commercial uses, however, very quickly the concept of "apartment living"—as pioneered in New York City—spread in popularity. The evolution of the apartment house as it occurred in New York carefully balanced the demands of rising land costs with the domestic ideals of the middle class family, ideally based in nuclear units and contained within a single family house.[10] Left with little choice beyond leaving the city, middle- and upper-class New Yorkers accepted the multistory apartment house and enjoyed its ever-increasing inclusion of the latest domestic technologies and socially acceptable apartment layouts. Not long after the first highrise apartment houses rose on Manhattan, the trend moved beyond New York and was employed in other cities for reasons ranging from necessity to cutting-edge fashionability.

The City of Philadelphia had always prided itself on being the "city of houses" spreading out from the center square in block after block of attached dwellings ranging from extremely modest to overly modish. As early as 1886, however, even Philadelphia—with none of the real estate constrictions present in Manhattan—debated the need and viability of apartment houses in the city. In an article entitled "Shall We Have Apartment Houses?," the *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* encouraged the construction of apartments despite this single-family house tradition.[11] The article noted that with the increasing number of streetcar lines continued lateral expansion was assured, but this expansion also had a down-side as it prolonged commutes from home to work. The article was geared to the children of the middle class as it balanced the expense of a central location near theaters, churches, shopping, and the central business district with the economy of only having to furnish an apartment—the children of the upper class presumably had the resources to own houses in such a central location. For professional bachelors of both classes, there was no question that apartment houses would be quite worthwhile for them. The arguments presented in this article were clearly not lost on Philadelphians as a number of apartment houses were constructed—mostly in center city—from that year into the early 1890s and later.

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[10]Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 2–3.

[11]"Shall We Have Apartment Houses?," *Record* 1:6 (15 Feb. 1886): 61.

As previously noted, in many ways—at least from the perspective of its residents and developers—fashionable North Philadelphia acted as a foil to the old elite residences and institutions of center city. For example, in August 1887, the Grand Opera House was completed at the corner of Broad Street and Montgomery Avenue (only to be supplanted twenty years later by the massive Oscar Hammerstein propelled Metropolitan Opera House located at Broad and Poplar) to service that area in a manner similar to the center city Academy of Music. In this context then, it should come as no surprise that by 1892 plans were in motion for the construction of a highrise apartment house on North Broad Street.

In November 1892, the Lincoln Market at the southeast corner of Broad Street and Fairmount Avenue was sold to a stock company made up of Philadelphians and New Yorkers.[12] Plans were announced at this time for twelve-story apartment house designed by architect Willis G. Hale of buff-colored brick which would include a roof garden for summer concerts. Hale rose in importance as a prolific Philadelphia architect in the decades after the Civil War and by early in the 1890s his over-the-top designs soon were well-known having become the darling of upscale North Philadelphia residential design under the aegis of streetcar barons William L. Elkins and Peter A. B. Widener. Hale's ebullient facades often contrasted sculpture, tile, inventive brick and stone work, in true high-Victorian form. Unfortunately, Hale's inventiveness and modish designs—and the neighborhood in which they were constructed—went out of favor quickly. By the 1890s, though still involved in some area development, Elkins and Widener had abandoned their North Broad Street residences and literally moved on to greener pastures further out of the city.

On account of its high visibility as a North Broad Street monument, it is appropriate that Hale was chosen to design the "Universal," a name later changed to the "Lorraine." The final plans called for a ten-story building with a steel frame, hollow brick floors, and a brick, stone, and terra cotta exterior wall.[13] The first floor contained stores facing Broad Street, an entrance lobby, a bakery, dining room, café, and reading room and the basement housed a swimming pool and billiard rooms. The upper floors contained 240 rooms arranged in suites of two to seven rooms to be "fitted with and without kitchens and baths."[14] Many of the early apartment houses and "apartment hotels" contained a variety of units catering to different individuals and families. Thus, some of the units were fully-equipped apartment "homes" ostensibly meant for couples or young families, while others probably fell into the category of "bachelor flats." Bachelor flats tended to be two to five room suites that, while often having inclusive bathrooms, rarely contained kitchens; the male occupants taking most meals in the building's dining room or outside.[15] Given the Lorraine's close proximity to the offices, stores, and theaters of center city as well as its prominent location on the southern end of a premier residential neighborhood—the stockholders probably envisioned occupancy by both affluent bachelors and young married couples who would be able to affordably claim a prestigious address and enjoy the nearby conveniences and entertainments of center city. The *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* declared that the Lorraine "will be one of the most elegant buildings in the city. It will contain all the best features of a first-

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[12]*Record* 7:48 (30 Nov. 1892): 1635.

[13]*Record* 8:6 (8 Feb. 1893): 78 and 8:27 (5 Jul. 1893): 413; and Hexamer,1897, for descriptions of the structure and accommodations.

[14]*Record* 8:6 (8 Feb. 1893): 78.

[15]Cromley, 188–189.

class hotel and home."[16] Beyond the size of the accommodations, the Lorraine was conceived to include a full staff, steam heat, electric lights and bells, passenger and freight elevators, speaking tubes, and laundry facilities; "no points of comfort have been overlooked by the projector of the enterprise."[17]

> Thus the apartment house [like the Lorraine] presented itself as a fully serviced home, with the expenses of individual house-keeping shared among the many… such a full array of modern equipment was rarely available to private-house owners except for the wealthiest, whereas apartments made modern life accessible to the middle class.[18]

In June 1893, the purchase of the Lincoln Market was completed and demolition of that building commenced.[19] The plans for the building were passed by the "Board of Building Inspector" on June 28, invitations for carpentry and bricklaying bids issued on July 12, and construction started in August 1893.[20] By December, construction of "the 'Lorraine Apartment' [was] being pushed with much vigor and…approaching the fourth and fifth floors."[21]

When completed in 1894, the Lorraine Apartment House became an instant landmark contributing to the civic and institutional importance of the blocks to the immediate north and south as well as announcing the southern terminus of the most fashionable stretch of residential North Broad Street. With its twin parapets—articulated by pilasters, heavy cornices, and pediments—and its double arches across the front-facing lightwell the Lorraine used an increasingly popular classical vocabulary to triumphantly declare the importance of this area of Philadelphia. Unfortunately, North Broad Street above Spring Garden could not hold onto its appeal. Hale's North Philadelphia commissions "were built at the outer limits of fashion, and like everything a la mode, they went out of fashion just as quickly…in building so fashion-conscious a neighborhood, the residents of North Philadelphia doomed themselves to move on as soon as it became dated."[22]

In 1900, the *Hotel Red Book*—an annual compilation of hotel information for cities and towns throughout the United States—noted the Lorraine functioned as a "family hotel," however by 1910 this designation is not present.[23] While this omission does not conclusively indicate that the structure's primary status as a residential hotel had changed, the areas to the north along Broad Street and west of that thoroughfare were becoming less fashionable as younger generations of the Protestant elite established residences in Main Line suburbs. By 1920, the structure was referred to as the "Hotel Lorraine" rather than the earlier "Lorraine

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[16] *Record* 8:24 (14 Jun. 1893): 366.
[17] *Record* 8:6 (8 Feb. 1893): 78.
[18] Cromley, 201.
[19] *Record* 8:24 (14 Jun. 1893): 366.
[20] *Record* 8:27 (5 Jul. 1893): 413, 8:28 (12 Jul. 1893): 439, 8:32 (9 Aug. 1893): 506.
[21] *Record* 8:49 (6 Dec. 1893): 737.
[22] Thomas, 114.
[23] *Hotel Red Book: United States' Official Hotel Directory* (hereafter *Red Book*), New York: Official Hotel Red Book and Directory Co., 1900, 1910.

Apartment House" or merely the "Lorraine."[24] Furthermore, the building's half-page *Red Book* advertisement stressing its location "Directly on the Lincoln Highway" as well as its parking facilities attest to the fact that a sizable portion of the building's patronage extended from overnight travelers rather than permanent tenants.[25] The 1930 half-page advertisement notes that the structure had become an "Official AAA Hotel" and gave "reduced rates for children." Additionally, a local radio station—WFAN—appears to have taken-up residence on the top floor and, if the rendering in the ad is correct, constructed two transmission towers on the roof.

By the 1930s, after a few decades of widespread Jewish ownership of many North Philadelphia properties, the resident composition of the vicinity shifted once again. By the 1940s, the neighborhoods immediately north of Center City were home to Philadelphia's African-American population. The change in racial make-up in the area and its perceived unsavory character to potential white overnight guests might indicate why the 1940 *Red Book* listing for the "Hotel Lorraine" contains only two lines. In 1948, under the aegis of Reverend Major J. "Father" Divine, the Unity Mission Church—an interracial, cross-class religious organization whose followers included members of the surrounding community—purchased the Lorraine Hotel. With desegregation as one of the Church's aims, the renamed Divine Lorraine Hotel became one of the first high-end integrated hotels in the United States.[26] Not surprisingly, the hotel was not even listed in the 1949–1950 *Red Book*, perhaps on account of its religious affiliation, but more likely because of its desegregated state in a still-segregated nation. After fifty years of careful stewardship, the building was recently sold by the Universal Peace Mission to private developers.

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[24] *Red Book*, 1920.

[25] George W. and Walter S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*, 1922.

[26] "Father Divine," Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission plaque, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1994.

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**HISTORIAN:** James A. Jacobs, Summer 2000.

**PROJECT INFORMATION**:

The documentation of the Divine Lorraine Hotel was undertaken during the summer of 2000 as part of a larger program to record historic landmarks and historically significant structures in North Philadelphia. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), E. Blaine Cliver, Chief of HABS/HAER, and Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief of HABS; funding was made possible through a congressional appropriation for documentation in Southeastern Pennsylvania and supplemented by a William Penn Foundation grant to the Foundation for Architecture for educational purposes. The project was planned and administered by HABS historian Catherine C. Lavoie and HABS architect Robert R. Arzola. The project historian was James A. Jacobs (George Washington University). Large format photography was undertaken by Joseph Elliott.